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ABSTRACT

Preservice teachers' constructions of meaning within a multicultural education course are explored in this study. The study considers whether prior expectations have an impact on service learning, what meanings preservice teachers make from service learning, and whether reflection has an influence on meaning making. This interpretive case study used 24 preservice teachers in a multicultural education course. Community-based service learning was a 20-hour course component in which inquiry teams of three to six preservice teachers worked together at each community organization. Services responded to site-based needs and included tutoring, teaching small groups, and assisting recreational programs. An African-American family, familiar with the neighborhood served, acted as mentors, participated in two reflective sessions, and answered questions that arose from service learning. Data generated included introductory letters and a series of reflective essays written by preservice teachers. Three reflective sessions were videotaped, and class assignments and field-based projects were collected. Data were read and reread to determine themes and trends. Given the diversity of the class, the construction of meaning in a multicultural education course is a complex, varied, and somewhat idiosyncratic process, as profiles of several students illustrate. Preservice teachers learned that the process of confirmation or disconfirmation is not simple. Preservice teachers seemed to grow more comfortable with it over time. Contains 19 references. (BT)

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The Construction of Meaning:

Learning from Service Learning

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Constructions of meaning: what do preservice teachers learn from community-based service learning? Does it "make a difference" in their perceptions of diversity, equality, and equity? Or, does it reinforce stereotypes and attitudes of supremacy? Presently, research that explores the effects of service learning as part of multicultural education is limited. However, research suggests that service learning can assist the aims of multicultural education. Particularly, service learning can foster increased awareness and acceptance of cultural diversity (e.g., Boyle-Baise, 1998; DeJong & Groomes, 1996; Hones, 1997; Sleeter, 1995; Tellez et al, 1995), heighten commitment to teach diverse youth (e.g., Fuller, 1998), and motivate prospective teachers to examine their prejudicial, stereotypical beliefs (e.g., Fuller, 1998; O'Grady, 1997; Seigel, cited in Wade, 1998). Alternatively, it can be difficult to spur social critique and activism through service learning experiences (e.g., Boyle-Baise, 1998; Vadenboncoeur, Rahm, Aguilera, & LeCompte, 1996). Regardless of this latter challenge, research suggests promise for the linkage of service learning and multicultural education.

Yet, theoretical views of this connection are cautious, even pessimistic. Potentially, service learning may do more harm to than good. It may suffer from benefaction: people with more give to people with less, service starts in privilege and ends in patronage (Radest, 1993; Rhoads, 1997; Varlotta, 1997). Consequently, service learning might reinforce, rather than confute, deficit orientations to culturally or socially different "others" (e.g., Cruz, 1990; O'Grady & Chappell, in press). Service learning might represent, as O'Grady and Chappell (in press) argue, a new form of "noblese oblige." These concerns are weighty for multicultural education; service learning could mitigate the intentions of the field.

Caution is warranted, yet skepticism seems premature. Rather, exploratory studies are very much "in-process" and the "verdict" is far from "in." Judgements should depend upon

evaluation of ample, descriptive data. This study bolsters the data base about service learning for multicultural education. Specifically, the study explores preservice teacher's constructions of meaning within a multicultural education course. The study considers the following questions:1) what impact do prior expectations have on service learning, 2) what meanings do preservice teachers make from service learning, and 3) what influence does reflection have on meaning-making? Additionally, implications for teacher education are suggested.

The Inquiry

This is an interpretive case study. Twenty four preservice teachers in my multicultural education course represented the case studied. Of twenty four class members, seven were females of color, six were African American, and one was Filipino American (this student did not complete the course). The other seventeen class members were European American; thirteen were females and four were males. One prospective teacher was bilingual, most were Christian, middle-class, college age, and from within the state.

Community-based service learning was a credited, twenty-hour course component. Prospective teachers were placed in community organizations that served culturally diverse and low-income youth, and they selected their own placements. Cultural border crossing was a goal of placement, but was mitigated somewhat by self-selection. Service sites included: Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church, Boys and Girls Club, Banneker Westside Community Center, Diversity Theater (a troupe focused on plays about disability), Girls Inc., and Headstart.

Inquiry teams of three to six preservice teachers worked together at each community organization. Services responded to site-based needs and included tutoring, teaching small groups, and assisting recreational programs. A field-based project, developed in concert with site

directors, went beyond usual volunteer activities. As field projects, three inquiry teams taught a series of lessons to small groups, one team organized a mini-sports camp, another developed a safe alternative to Halloween, and another lead an audience discussion about issues raised in a play about disabling conditions.

In-class reflection occurred biweekly. An African American family, familiar with the neighborhood served, acted as mentors. The family participated in two reflective sessions and answered questions that arose from service learning.

Data were generated from the following sources. Preservice teachers wrote introductory letters and a series of reflective essays. Three reflective sessions were videotaped, and the tapes were transcribed. Additionally, class assignments and field-based projects were collected. This data base was limited to the extent that it was based on self reports, which commonly tilt toward positive self-perceptions and satisfied evaluations of service learning.

These data were read and reread to ascertain points made by each preservice teacher and, then, to determine themes and trends. Constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to search for diversity within responses. Special attention was paid to influences of race, social class, gender, and geographic background on responses. Several preservice teachers, who differed in background and in perceptions of service, were selected for in-depth profiles.

Three voices are presented in this narrative: mine, pre-service teacher's, and a parent mentor's. As author, my voice is ubiquitous, yet in the final section, I distance myself from the data and offer my own perceptions of the project. Parent mentors are community people, knowledgeable about local affairs and members of minority or low-income groups, invited to assist class reflections. In this case, the Efiom family had a three year history with the course.

The family's involvement stemmed from Patricia's participation in a planning group that considered ways to engage the community in multicultural teacher education (Boyle-Baise, 1997). Patricia's writes about her experience as mentor. To indicate voice, our names are noted, prior to our comments. Pre-service teacher's voices are depicted traditionally, as quoted material.

Constructions of Meaning

What might preservice teachers learn from service learning? As this study evolved from my own multicultural education course, my views of this question are significant. To me, service learning is a perspective and a process. It is a form of community-based learning in which students volunteer in local organizations and respond to site-based needs. It is an opportunity to work with community brokers, knowledgeable about local affairs. As part of multicultural education, community-based learning should be attentive to and supportive of cultural diversity, cultural pluralism, and social justice. This means that relationships of reciprocity and mutuality should characterize service learning: local leaders should participate in planning projects; and students should learn from and give to community ventures (Rhoads, 1997). Additionally, community-based service learning is a process of experiential, relational learning: students learn from the community, from personal experience, and from classmates (Palmer, 1990). The aims of this approach are greater understanding of and respect for culturally and socially diverse groups and heightened awareness of social conditions which impact communities.

How might preservice teachers learn from service learning? Scheckley and Keeton (1997) propose that individuals construct meaning through the confirmation or disconfirmation of prior understandings. Confirmation is a comfortable learning preference while disconfirmation is an unsettling event. Further, individuals filter their experiences through a "perceptual screen

composed of cultural norms, individual values, and personal experiences" (Scheckley & Keeton, 1997, p. 36). Radest (1993) refers to cultural screening as a confrontation with familiarity and strangeness. For Radest: "the community service project always involves crossing some cultural line and entails a meeting with strangers...in the meeting of strangers, I also meet myself as a stranger" (p. 120).

For many of the preservice teachers with whom I work, service learning is a "first" direct exposure to cultural diversity and poverty. For others, preservice teachers who identify with racial or ethnic minority groups or come from low-income backgrounds, deprivation or discrimination is "nothing new." Given this diversity, the construction of meaning in a multicultural education course likely is a complex, varied, and somewhat idiosyncratic process.

Profiles

These profiles sketch individuals who represented varied interpretive stances. The profiles relate to a conceptual framework that Christine Sleeter and I developed (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 1998). For that project, we compiled data from117 preservice teachers who completed service learning within our multicultural education courses over a four year period. Data from this case was part of that project, however, the aggregation of information glossed over categories and points emphasized here. These profiles amplify that conceptual framework.

Prior Expectations

In introductory letters, about half of the white prospective teachers, male and female, shared their interests, described brothers and sisters, and noted things important to them. They related special talents, such as playing the piano, and sketched their campus lives. Many disclosed their reasons for selecting teaching as a career: they liked children, they thought

teaching would be rewarding, they intended to coach, or they had family who were teachers. The lack of cultural or racial markers in these self-descriptions was striking.

The other half of this group, all female, were a little nervous about pending community service, but thought it a beneficial opportunity to interact with populations previously distant to them. For example, one European American preservice teacher wrote that "in [name] county all the students I have come in contact with have been from my same ethnic and economic background. I think the experiences in this class will be to my advantage" (L.C.P., 9/2/97). Similarly, another European American preservice teacher wrote: "Coming from a small town, I was not exposed to a lot of diversity. We had approximately five African American students throughout our entire school. I think this course will be a great help to me, as I have not been exposed to a diverse setting" (K.S., 9/1/97). As noted in a previous study (Boyle-Baise, 1998), expectations for cross-cultural "exposure" through service were pronounced, at least among those who stepped outside their comfort zone to consider it.

Alternatively, all of the preservice teachers of color, referenced their ethnic backgrounds in some way in introductory letters. For example, "I'm from [name of city], the urban population is not that large there. It is mostly white, as were the teachers. Still, I had a good experience in high school. I enjoyed singing and traveled with the choir to sing at Carnegie Hall " (E. P., 9/2/97). Four of the six African Americans wanted to teach in order to give something back to home communities. For example, "I plan to open a daycare center when I graduate. . . .In my area, teens drop out of school because of lack of daycare that is affordable to all. I really want to do something with my life" (J.P., 9/1/97). As another example, "I had good, strong, supportive teachers in my past and I would like to repay them by becoming the same for some of today's

troubled youth" (K.J., 9/3/97). All of these preservice teachers were from cities of some size and diversity, several came from large families. To the extent discernable from brief letters, this group perceived the service experience through different cultural lenses than their European American counterparts.

A Deficit View

Leslie was a European American preservice teacher who eagerly anticipated interactions with people culturally and economically different from herself. She lived in a rural area, was married and a recent parent, and commuted to campus daily. She openly was religious, and embraced all children as part of God's human family. In her first reflective essay, she described the children at her community center placement as "underprivileged." She considered the children "wonderful," but "rowdy, and she concerned with behavior management. "With these kids you can not say behave or you get a time out. It simply does not work. I think we are learning some tricks. We gave kids attention if they were being good" (L.C.P., 10/6/97). In an early reflective session, Leslie wondered how to respond to an active African American boy at the center: "We have a boy. . . who is anxious, well he's mean. [Maybe] he feels out of place. He is the only black boy. Yesterday, another black boy came and he was better. I never dealt with anything like that before" (L.C.P., 10/8/97).

The theme of behavior management recurred in Leslie's second essay, "My experience at [community center] is going better than I expected. I had some trouble getting the children to behave. They got upset over little things. They craved attention" (L.C.P., 10/22/97). She felt her inquiry team handled things well; they ignored rambunctious behavior and rewarded considerate actions. Yet, behavioral issues were paramount, and she questioned parent mentors about them

during a subsequent reflective session. In regard to the African American child, she queried: "what can we do to make him feel more comfortable and not threatened?" (L.C.P., 10/22/97).

In her final essay, Leslie returned to management concerns, still uncertain about "dealing with" the African American youth. Also, she discussed her team's field project, a series of story readings, again, in terms of conduct. "After we finished the story, we asked the children questions. They knew the correct answers. That really surprised me. They talked all through the reading" (L.C.P. 10/17/97).

This preservice teacher expressed deficit views in behavioral terms. She did not realize that her interpretations were grounded in her middle class, white cultural frame of reference, and that she possibly misread children's actions. This perception is difficult to disrupt, as it is couched in seemingly normative behavioral expectations. The need to control active children was mentioned by seven of thirteen European American women. Related to this management orientation was the perception of oneself as a role model, particularly someone to provide "stability," offer "attention," and "be there for them." Six European American women perceived themselves in this role. This interpretation assumed the children lacked permanency, and needed to be "saved" through the provision of constancy and control (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 1998).

A Pragmatic View

Learning to "deal" with or "handle" children also characterized the statements of the four white males in the class. However, the meaning of these terms differed for males and females. For the men, service learning seemed to be a first opportunity to interact with children. For the women it was a first effort to manage youth of color or from low-income situations.

One of the men found the experience "eye-opening," in fact, he utilized this descriptor in

each of three reflective essays. For Will, "this opportunity really opened my eyes to the great aspects of teaching elementary kids." For him, the most "outstanding part of the project is that you have the opportunity to build relationships with younger people, who worship you." The children's welcoming smiles helped Will "feel really appreciated." The experience "enhanced my ability to communicate with kids" (W.H., 10/6/97).

Themes of "first contact," "learning to work with kids," and "making a difference" reverberated through Wills's writing. In his second reflective essay he wrote: "It is my first real experience to be able to interact with the same kids on a regular basis, and really get to know them." Will was satisfied to find "different ways to work with different kinds of kids," and to "make a difference" (W.H., 10/22/97). Similar to many of his classmates, Will defined "making a difference" as offsetting assumed deficiencies in children's lives. Will wrote the following question for a reflective session: "Sometimes I feel I am the only male figure kids have to look up to. Is this true? What does it mean for me as a future teacher?" (W.H., 10/22/97).

In his final essay, Will evaluated his experience at the community center in the following way: "I learned a lot of things I will carry with me throughout my future educational experiences." He learned the "importance of caring for children and how easy it is to work with a different bunch of kids." Most problems were "behavioral and easy to correct." In general, the experience was an "eye-opener. I saw first-hand some of the problems children have and the way in which an individual can make a change in that child's attitude" (W.H., 11/17/97).

Will and his male classmates tended to express confidence about their engagement with children. They searched for practical, positive ways to guide diverse youth. One of the men described service learning as "very helpful training for teaching" (B.A., 10/22/97). Yet, their

pragmatism was tinged with compensatory views. Will's descriptions of what was "eye-opening" included increased awareness of children's "problems." Additionally, three of four men considered themselves role models, perhaps children's only positive male role model. This perception exemplified further the savior stance taken by many white women.

A Self-exploratory View

Wanda, a European American preservice teacher, took steps to educate herself about cultural diversity prior to the course. She volunteered to be a CommUNITY Educator (CUE) in the residence halls, to lead discussions among fellow students about issues related to cultural diversity. In her introductory letter, she hoped that service as a CUE, in conjunction with community-based service learning, would assist her in "learning more about myself and others around me" (W.B., 9/1/97). Wanda chose to do her community service in a local black church, along with two African American preservice teachers. In her first reflective essay, Wanda described her initial perceptions of the church in this way:

> My first visit was quite awkward for me. I was really nervous going there, thinking that I would be the only white person. This was the first time that I had ever been truly aware of the color of my skin. Every time I shook someone's hand, I wondered what he or she was thinking of me. (W.B., 10/8/97)

She realized that in Sunday school, when teacher and students discussed slavery as something "we" experienced, the "we" did not include her. "I knew I could not be included in how they felt because neither I nor people like me had been through the experiences their people endured" (W.B., 10/8/97). She described her experiences as "uncomfortable" and "insightful" (W.B., 10/8/97). This experience emotionally jolted her to realizations about the realities of whiteness.

In her second essay, Wanda wrote that she "continued to learn more about young people and myself" (W.B., 8/22/97). She felt more comfortable, and she was able to concentrate on the children in her charge. She noticed that young children wandered the aisles and talked freely during church services, in contrast to her own childhood. She wondered how this freedom might translate to the school setting. During a subsequent reflective session, Wanda puzzled this through with parent mentors. She queried: At [name of church] children move around freely, like walking up and down the aisles during services. Will this influence how these children interact at school? Should I expect them to sit quietly during class? The mentors, also members of this church, explained that there was little for children to do during long services, and that movement was necessary. They taught their own children to abide by the rules of the situation. Thus, from their view, sitting quietly at school was appropriate.

Overall, Wanda thought her experience was a "great opportunity to be in a place not natural for me. I was often the only white person in the room, which rarely happens to me" (W.B., 11/17/97). Additionally, she "learned to appreciate the perspectives of others on a deeper level" (W.B., 11/17/97). This orientation toward self-exploration was mentioned by five white women in reflective essays. However, only Wanda and one other classmate probed their middle-class, white status. The realizations of the other three preservice teachers tilted toward the pragmatic; they pondered their views of "at-risk" or "disadvantaged," children and were "surprised" and to find it "fun" to work with these children. In their introductory letters, four of these women noted that they "looked forward" to learning more about cultural diversity from the class and from service learning.

An Activist View

Kayla was one of the African American female preservice teachers who wanted to "give something back to her community." In her introductory letter, Kayla wrote that, as a teacher, she wanted to return the support given to her as a youth:

> Most people do not have as supportive a mom as mine. She managed to work and raise us on her own and still attended all my games. I also have some of my teachers to thank for my motivation. This is another reason why I wanted to become a teacher. I want to show kids there is a future waiting for them if they want it. (K.J., 9/3/97)

Kayla completed her community service at a local black church where she found herself learning "what I feel a good teacher should be able to do. . . relate the subject being taught to everyday life" (K.J., 10/7/97). Like some of her classmates, Kayla viewed service learning pragmatically, but unlike them, her thoughts were oriented toward the discovery of student's cultural backgrounds: "I feel this will help me to understand more of where students. . . are coming from"(K.J., 10/7/97). She hoped her future students might feel as "at home" in her classroom as they did in the church.

Kayla realized that life was tough for some of the children, yet she saw them as resourceful: "These kids are not from Beverly Hills 90210. They live real lives with real problems, and have more insight on the world than teachers give them credit for" (K.J., 10/22/97). As a black woman, she felt attuned to these children: "These families welcome you versus the high class moms at the "Y" (YMCA, where she volunteered previously) who are leery of what a young black woman can impress upon their children" (K.J., 10/22/97).

Kayla wanted to make a difference in her student's lives. She started a breakfast program

at the church, beyond course requirements, to help increase Sunday School attendance. After serving the first breakfast, she wrote: "It made me feel that, one step at a time, I can really make a difference in the lives of my students" (K.J., 10/2/97).

In her final essay, Kayla noted that education went beyond teaching subject matter: "it is about providing guidance for the students as well." From her community service, Kayla learned that religious conviction helped some children survive and "should be taken into account when trying to teach the student"(K.J. 11/17/97). Additionally, Kayla observed great diversity among the African American children in church. She concluded that it was false to think multicultural education was not needed in a classroom of black children.

Four of six African American preservice teachers wanted to "give something back to their communities." This translated into community improvement, spiritual and moral guidance, and culturally responsive teaching. Most of these preservice teachers were on their way to becoming activists for children, both inside and outside the school setting (Boyle-Baise & Sleeter, 1998).

Reflections

In order to prompt reflective discussion, preservice teachers were encouraged to express questions anonymously, via a question-box, or raise questions within reflective essays. Thus, our sessions began (and often ended) with a series of class-generated questions. Partially for this reason, reflection scratched the surface of diversity concerns. As suggested by the profiles, preservice teachers focused on disciplinary queries, cultural concerns, or moral issues. In order to illustrate the nature of reflection, two reflective exchanges are described.

Reflective Exchange I

Wanda, the student profiled earlier, shared her insights from the black church with the

class. She recalled:

> In Sunday school the teacher was talking about slavery. She said 'our' people and 'we' did. It was the first time I felt like an outsider. In our classes, teachers say 'we' and they are referring to white people. In my teaching when I say 'we,' I will have to be careful of who I mean. (W.B., 10/8/97)

I responded: "lots of times we don't specify what we mean when we say 'our' history or 'our' story. Can anyone add to this?"

Rather than pursue the point about racial discrimination, several class members picked up on Wanda's discomfort with her service situation. They turned the conversation to their own uncertainties about interactions with youth different from themselves. As they expressed initial fears and first impressions, perceptions of family life as fragmented and somewhat sensational emerged. For example, a European American female confided that, at the outset of her service, she feared the girls at Girls Inc. would not "like or talk to her." Instead, they openly discussed their lives. Yet, their lives were troubled and differed from her own: "A lot of the girls are from single parent homes. One girl told me her mom had a fight with her boyfriend and the police came. She asked me if I had a mom and dad and I was embarrassed to say yes (J.J., 10/8/97). Another European American female responded that "you just assume, I mean I had a mom and dad, that everyone has that. It is something to think about when we teach" (R.C., 10/8/97).

I asked the group what these realizations meant for them as teachers. They discussed alternatives to "dear mom and dad" salutations on school notes. I pushed consideration of family norms by asking if they knew of any strong single-parent homes. Two women, one European American, one African American, described the strengths of their own mother-headed

households. A short discussion followed in which I encouraged the class to imagine their lives at this moment--with the responsibilities of children, home, and job--without parental support for college. What would their homes, families, and job opportunities be like? A European American female responded: "I think this is a reality check for all of us" (K.S., 10/8/97).

Then (and now), I recognized that these exchanges only pricked the consciousness of many preservice teachers. The "why" papers described by Sleeter (1995), for which prospective teachers research a field-generated question and examine it according to in-group and out-group perspectives, might prod further exploration of these topics. Unfortunately, I did not assign "why" papers for this class, and the field projects resulted in fairly uncritical activities.

Reflective Exchange, II

Both parent mentors, along with their daughter, lead this reflective session. To initiate discussion, inquiry teams were asked to develop a question pertinent to their sites. A European American male in service at Boys and Girls Club asked: "after you spend a couple of hours with kids, they start telling you personal stuff about their families. I don't think I should hear it. I'm not sure how to react" (D.S., 10/22/97). One parent mentor replied:

> I disagree. I think you should listen to kids. The kids participating in programs sometimes need someone. Sometimes you can't talk to your parents. . .Or, some kids are more needy. My six year old needs a lot of attention. . . The best thing you can do is be a friend, that is what you are there for. (P.E., 10/22/97)

Following this exchange, another question was raised, this one by an African American preservice teacher in service at Girls Inc.: "I haven't done anything to leave an impression on the girls. I just help them with homework. Do you have any suggestions" (P.S., 10/22/97). The same

parent mentor replied: "We all have the responsibility to be role models. You are out there shining. . .You will leave an impression just by being there. Make sure you don't make assumptions about why the girls need attention" (P.E., 10/22/97).

At this juncture, I interjected: "you make an important point. We are starting to make judgements, yet we want to be positive. What kinds of things should we try to learn about the children?" This remark was followed by a question from Leslie, the preservice teacher profiled earlier: "We need to know how to deal with [the African American boy] at the center. We try to reward him for being good. He seems to enjoy going there now. Did it have anything to do with what we did" (L.C.P., 10/22/97)? The parent mentor answered: "It did, absolutely. He saw how he needed to work with you. . . I work with my own kids to let them know what is acceptable behavior" (P.E., 10/22/97). I probed this response: "Many of us are white and interacting with children of color. Are there differences in the ways different groups approach discipline?" The parent mentor responded: "I'm making a generalization, but typically black parents are stricter, more no nonsense than white parents." She gave several examples, then concluded: "it doesn't mean kids are less loved, there are just two different styles [of discipline]" (P.E., 10/22/97).

Subsequently, a question was raised by an African American preservice teacher: "In class we were talking about teaching morals. Some people thought morals should be taught at home. I think I will teach morals because I feel the school is your second home. What do you think?" (R.M., 10/22/97). Both parent mentors responded to this question, one explained that she taught her children to follow the teacher's rules, yet expected the teacher's rules to be fair. The other was saddened that his children still heard derogatory terms like "nigger" and "redneck." He hoped preservice teachers would not disregard insensitive remarks in their classrooms. As the

session came to a close, both mentors encouraged the class to avoid judgements of children based on preconceived notions.

This exchange illustrates some contrast between queries by preservice teachers of color and white preservice teachers. The former raised questions of ethics: how can I be of service to this community, how can I teach morally? The latter raised questions of conduct: how should respond to stories about family life, how should I handle a situation that has racial overtones? Additionally, the exchange indicates the impact of minority group parents as cultural teachers.

Perceptions of a Parent Mentor

(Patricia's voice) Teaching in a formal setting was something I never aspired to. However, I have always felt an obligation to use my experiences to educate those around me. As an African American woman, I learned early in life that I had experiences I could share with non-African Americans, experiences that when shared in a non-threatening environment could prove to be one of the most useful teaching tools I have ever seen. If I were willing to take the risk and, with all of the emotion attached to the experience, tell my story, people were moved in a pretty powerful way.

Once I understood this, I realized that getting angry was a waste of valuable time and energy and that the only way to fight ignorance was through education. So when I was asked to be a parent mentor for preservice teachers as part of their multicultural education, I knew that another opportunity to make a difference was being presented to me. Of course, as I approached the classroom on that first day I could not help but wonder how the class would receive me. I knew that I had to speak from my heart and share experiences about my own children–experiences that were not always positive. I had to be clear and give solid examples. I

had to fight my own prejudices and not give in to the anger that I knew would well up inside of me from time to time. I had to be able to share emotional experiences, but keep my emotions in control. I had to teach these students, but not alienate them. I knew they were coming with a lot of stereotypes, and I had been called in to help disseminate some of those stereotypes. I needed to let these students know that I was not and could not speak for all parents. They needed to be comfortable enough in my presence to ask the questions that were really disturbing them, questions we all knew could be perceived as prejudiced. How could I do all of this in a question and answer session that would last one hour?

In introducing myself, I tried to be as warm and welcoming as I could. I let the students know that I would answer any question that was presented to me. As expected, questions at the first session were tentative. We were getting to know each other, could they really trust me? By far the most meaningful session for me was when I went back the second time. I passed the test the first time around, I did not get angry or defensive, and I answered all the questions. This time I returned with my husband and 10 year old daughter. The instructor and I agreed to offer students the opportunity to write out their questions, which would be given to me at the beginning of the session. It seemed to me that the questions were more well thought out, that students were less inhibited, and that once we answered a particular question students seemed to want open discussion. The more bold the questions the more comfortable we became with each other. By the end of the session we were going strong and none of us wanted to end. Following the session, students took the time to approach each of us and continue the discussion. It was clear that this session had been very beneficial. I attribute this to the fact that it was our second session together, and the written questions were definitely a success.

The parent mentor program was a vital part of the learning experience for these preservice teachers as they explored unfamiliar cultures and dealt with their own prejudices and stereotypes. It was clear from the sessions that they needed the opportunity to discuss their new experiences and understand what was happening to them. They needed to hear that a lot of what they experienced had nothing to do with race or ethnicity, but with children in general. For example, they needed to understand that most children come home from school "starving," not just underprivileged or minority children.

I got a great deal of satisfaction from watching these students develop new perceptions. It was also refreshing for me to see what our future educators will look like.

Learning from Service Learning

What did preservice teachers learn from community-based service learning? This case indicates that the process of confirmation or disconfirmation is not simple. Fears of children of color, from poverty, or with disabilities tended to decrease, often, they were replaced by hunger to know more about diverse youth. Unfortunately, the desire to know often was couched in behavioral rather than cultural terms. The most intensive disconfirmation generated new understandings of whiteness among a few European American preservice teachers. There was some confirmation of stereotypes, particularly in regard to problematic family lives. Certainly, this was an area of presumption; family conditions were dealt with minimally as part of this experience. Simultaneously, confirmation was an affirmative experience. Across the board, preservice teachers hoped to "make a difference," and service learning validated these hopes. Some assertions smacked of patronage, especially perceptions of self as a stable, positive role model for youth from low-income families. However, to a small degree, role models also were

considered "shining stars," lights needed by all children. For the most part, service learning was considered "very helpful training for teaching." It confirmed the possibility of teaching in culturally diverse or low-income situations, for all preservice teachers. Also, it yielded some strategies for culturally responsive teaching. Although a pragmatic effect may be less than ideal, in the long run, students will gain from culturally informed instructors.

Preservice teachers encountered strangeness and seemed to grow more comfortable with it overtime. Even teachers with deficit notions conquered initial fears and enjoyed service with children and adults different from themselves. To some extent, preservice teachers examined themselves and questioned their perceptions of the familiar. However, it appeared that in-depth analysis of the impact of race or social class on one's life choices or chances was limited. Even given this caveat, service learning provides a venue to explore notions of similarity and diversity, closeness and distance.

Implications for Teacher Education

(Lynne's voice) It is difficult to take something apart, then put it back together again. Should these interpretations be considered separately or cumulatively? Separately, some prospective teachers held deficit views, feared unruliness, and sought techniques to control children in poverty or of color. Cumulatively, preservice teachers utilized the experience to gain teaching expertise, prompt self-assessment, or initiate activism. Rather than denigrate or celebrate service learning, what can be learned from these perceptions?

What preservice teachers learned seemed dependent upon their readiness to learn. Most European American prospective teachers were at a "first exposure" level, a place where they had "never dealt with this before." They struggled to overcome deficit views and to gain comfort in

pluralistic situations. Many confronted strangeness, but needed to control it. However, two white preservice teachers, one involved in campus-wide diversity activities, the other in tune with self-esteem problems, seemed more developmentally able to wrestle with issues of equality than their counterparts. In comparison, preservice teachers of color seemed ready and eager to tackle culturally responsive teaching and to assist diverse youth beyond school settings.

Our teaching can be informed by "first exposures" to pluralism. For example, I now realize that deficit (and pragmatic) views might be linked to issues of control. This knowledge enables me to confront and question connections between poverty, ethnic minority identity, and chaos. I can ask: what is there to control? Further, I can improve reflective sessions and activities to grapple with assumptions and presumptions more robustly. As instructor, I, too, learn from service learning, especially from in-depth analysis of my work.

Yet, perhaps it makes sense to ask ourselves: what is enough to expect from service learning? Certainly, expectations should stretch to include preservice teachers for whom this is a first encounter, and those for whom this is an additional experience with diversity. For many preservice teachers, it might be enough to jolt awareness and to challenge stereotypes. For many, it might be enough to realize children learn differently and to gain techniques to reach them. For some, service learning might serve as a springboard for further community involvement and civic action. For all, service learning engagements often are too short to motivate major conceptual shifts or to spur activism.

Finally, learning from service learning extends to community relations. For example, relationships with my community partners tend to strengthen and deepen overtime. Trust develops. Care ensues. Overtime, I express my intentions and intervene more strongly. I learn

which placements assist affirmative perceptions or assert compensatory views, and change future placements accordingly. The development of community relationships takes time, but no more than that necessary to interact with teachers and schools. It is a matter of focus and priority.

The verdict is still "out." Constructions of meaning do evidence some thoughts of "noblese oblige." There is a savior mentality that undermines respectful equality. However, it does not follow that there are inherent problems with service learning. In this case, preservice teachers remained open to reconsideration of deficit or supremacy views. Potentially, an instructor can strongly support rethinking through reflective exchanges and class activities. Perhaps we, multicultural educators, need to remain open too: what can we learn about service learning? It is premature to denigrate a perspective and method that connects multicultural education with the communities it is intended to serve.

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